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NO-TONGUE, A MANDAN TALE

BY GEORGE F. WILL

THIS story was told by James Holding Eagle, a young Mandan Indian, who learned it from his mother, Scattered-Corn Woman, one of the few living full-blood Mandans. It is what he called a "four-nights' story;" that is, one which takes for the telling four long winter evenings, when the young people gather around the old lady after the evening work is done.

He says that it is a Mandan story which has been told among them for many years. We find, however, the same story in both the Arikara and Pawnee myths of Dorsey, only in fragmentary form, or broken up into several short tales. The story as here given is about half of the whole tale, although it forms an almost complete story in itself. The remainder of the story tells of No-Tongue's deeds and renown, acquired among his people in the village. It has not as yet been taken down.

At a certain village headed by a certain chief there once lived a man and his wife and their two children, — the elder a girl; the other one (some two years younger), about seven or eight years old, a boy. The woman used to leave the village and go into the woods to do her work of preparing and dressing hides. One day the man followed her to a lonely spot in the woods, and killed her. He cut off one leg, and hid the rest of the body. The leg he smeared with the hair and blood of a deer, then he built a fire and cooked it.

After a while, the two children came that way, and their father gave them their mother's flesh to eat. Then he left them and went back to the village. After a while, the children also returned to the village. There they found themselves avoided by all. Their father had given out the report that they had killed their mother and eaten her flesh.

The chief soon called a council to decide what should be done with the children. After some debate, it was determined that they should be taken by the police out into the woods and lost. So the next day the police took the two children a long ways into the woods, and left them there without food. The children wandered around for several days, living on berries and such roots as they could find. Then, finally, they made their way back to the village again. Once more the children were taken far into the woods and abandoned by the police; but after much suffering, they returned once again to the village.

Then a council was again called; and it was decided, at their father's urgent plea, to lose the children once more, and then to leave the

village, and move inland for a long stay. So once more the children were taken far into the woods and left; and that night all the inhabitants of the village packed up their belongings and went away.

The boy and girl wandered around for many days, barely subsisting on berries and roots. Then, at last, hungry and tired, they got back to the village, only to find it deserted, with no food to be found. They cried about the village for some time, and at last found the trail which their people had left. This trail they followed for several days, and finally, exhausted and almost dead with hunger, came to the tepees of their people. It was evening, and they ventured to enter an old and much worn tepee on the outskirts of the camp. Within was a poor old woman. When she saw them, though she recognized who they were, she felt sorry, and asked them in and gave them food.

Then she told them that she would hide them for a day or so, but that all the people were against them, and they must go away. She told them to go back to the village on the river-bank, and told them how to find her house. In the house, she said, was a cache; and she gave directions for finding it. In the cache were corn, beans, squashes, and fat, with dishes, robes, and such utensils as were needed for sewing and cooking. In some way, however, the presence of the children in the camp was suspected; and the police were sent around to search every tepee. When they came to the old woman's house, she sat by the door. They asked her if the children were inside, and she did not answer. Then they entered, and found them.

The chief and the head men debated for a long time as to what should be done with the boy and girl this time; and finally it was decided to send them back to the old village with the police, and give orders to have them killed there. So, on the following day, the police took the two and went back. But when they came to the village, they felt sorry for them and did not want to kill them. So they rolled the two children tightly in a large heavy hide, and bound it firmly round the middle with a thong. The bundle thus made they placed on the very edge of a high, steep bank, at the base of which were many stones. To the bundle they fastened another cord, which they tied to a stake, so that, if the bundle rolled off, it would hang suspended over the edge of the bank.

Thus they left the children, who could do nothing to help themselves, and who were so placed that the slightest stirring might cause them to go over the edge. The boy and girl cried almost continuously, stopping only now and then to caution each other against struggling or moving. A long time they lay thus, weeping, and wondering what they had done to deserve such a fate. Then by and by they heard a crying from the direction of the village. At first they thought that it was people; but as it came nearer, they recognized it as the howling of a dog.

It was a very old dog, whose teeth were nearly worn out; and she was very weak. The dog came up, and began to chew on the thong which fastened the children to the stake. She chewed for a long time, crying, and resting occasionally; and all the time the children were fearful, lest they be pushed over the edge. Finally the dog began to chew on the thong which bound the hide, and the children were still more fearful. But, as the dog chewed, she pulled on the bundle, and gradually drew it back from the edge of the bluff. At last she broke the thong, and the hide loosened. The little girl was able to get out, and help the little boy out.

Then they started back to the village to look for the old woman's house; and as they went along, the old dog (which they had thankfully petted and caressed) followed them. They had no trouble in finding the old woman's house, and they found the cache just as she had described it. From it they got robes, utensils, and food enough to last them for some time; and the old dog was not forgotten.

For a long time they lived thus in the old woman's house, going out in the daytime to gather roots and berries, and returning at night. After a time, however, the weather began to grow colder; and the girl suggested that they go down into the bottom-land and build themselves a winter house in the woods. So they went down, and built a very little house, — just big enough for themselves and the dog. They built it just like the earth lodges, with a frame of poles covered with grass and then with earth; and in it they were snug and warm.

By this time, however, their food taken from the cache was gone, and they began to be very hungry. All the berries were dried up; and they could not dig roots, because the ground was frozen and the snow was coming. So they had to live entirely on the berries from the wild roses. They lived thus for some time. Every day, as they went out to gather rose-berries, they noticed how thick the rabbits were: so one day the little boy told his sister to make him a bow. The next day the sister worked at the bow, and finally succeeded in making a small one which he could handle. Then the little boy went out with his bow, and practised a great deal. Finally, on the first day, he managed to kill one rabbit, which he took home to his sister. She dressed the rabbit, and saved the skin. After this, the boy kept on hunting with his bow, and soon became a good hunter, and would bring in a number of rabbits every day.

Thus they lived along comfortably for some time, together with the old dog. One day the boy got close to a wolf on the edge of the bank, and managed to kill it. He dragged it home, and they made a robe from its hide.

One day, after thinking for a long time, the girl told her brother that she thought he ought to go up on the hill and fast and pray, as

the warriors do. In that way, they might get many good things, and good spirits would come to him. The boy did not understand what she meant at first; but she explained it to him, and he agreed to go. They had plenty of rabbits on hand, so that he did not need to hunt.

So the sister took the rabbit-skins and made him warm mittens and other warm things to wear, for it was very cold. Then she told him to remember whatever appeared to him, and, if he was asked for anything, he must at once give it. So, after dressing warm, he went up on a high hill before sunrise, and stood there all day, fasting and praying. Meanwhile the sister sat at home in the house. She was sorry for her brother, all alone and cold on the hill, and he was so little. And she cried all day.

When he came back at night, she asked him if he had seen anything; but he said that he had not. The next day he went again, very early, as before, and stood on the hill all day; and his sister staid at home and cried. That night, when his sister asked him if he had seen anything, he said that he had. He said that two men came to him out of the air, just as the sun was coming up. One of them asked him for something; but he did not just understand him, and, before he could answer, the man said to his companion, "He does not want to give it." And they disappeared before he could answer. As they went away, they sang a song.

The next morning the little boy prepared to go up on the hill again. His sister told him, if the men came again, to quickly give them what they asked for. So he went up on the hill, and again the men came just as the sun was rising. One man asked him for his tongue. The little boy took his knife with one hand, and tried to pull out his tongue with the other. But it always slipped from his fingers, and he could not hold it. And again the two men disappeared. As they went, they sang the same song.

When the boy told his sister what had happened, she got a little stick and made it very sharp. In the morning, when the little boy was ready to go up on the hill, she gave him the stick, and told him to stick it through his tongue when the men came, and then he could pull it out and cut it off easily. So the little boy went up on the hill; and his sister cried and cried at the thought of her poor little brother having to cut off his tongue. The men came once more, just at sunrise; and one of them again asked the little boy for his tongue. He pierced his tongue with the sharp stick, and thus was able to pull it out. He cut it off and handed it to the man. Then the man said, "That is a brave man! No one can get the best of him." And he said to the boy, "I will make you a great hunter and warrior, and you will be very powerful." Then the two men went away as before, singing the same song.

The little boy went back to his sister, crying, and with the blood running out of his mouth and over his clothes. His sister cried more than ever when she saw him. But she washed him up, and made him as comfortable as she could. He felt very bad for several days, but after that he was all right again.

One night there came two strange persons to their lodge, and the boy asked his sister to wait on them. After eating, these men went out without saying a word to them. Then the boy began to hunt again, and one day, on the edge of a high bluff, he met two men. They spoke to him, and said that they were the two men who came to his lodge one night, and they said they had a nice meal. They told him that they had been killed under that bluff, and that they made their home there now; that they knew all the hardships which he and his sister had endured; and that they were the ones who helped them get through all this hardship. They continued to talk to the boy, saying they knew that two persons had come to him when he was on the hill. The one that had promised to make him powerful was the Sun, they said, the other one was the Moon. The Sun would do all that he had promised; but No-Tongue must be very careful, for the Sun wanted him to die young. The Moon, they said, would help him, and keep him from being killed.

Then the two men said they would continue to help No-Tongue (for such he was henceforth called) and his sister. They told him that they would get all the spirits together, and make a big buffalo corral. They said he must go out and pick out a place for the corral on the next day, and then come and show them where it was. After this, the two men went away.

On the following day, No-Tongue went out and picked a place for a corral in a deep coulee, ending in a sort of pocket. Then he took the men to see the place. They told him that he and his sister must stay in the house the next day while the spirits built the corral. So the next day the boy and the girl staid in the house. Toward evening, the two men came to them, and told them that the corral was done. But they said that the scaffolds for the meat were to be built the next day, in the woods around the house, and that they must neither go out nor look out.

On the following day, then, the two remained shut up in the house again. And all day they heard a great clamor, — chopping and hammering, and the sound of many voices, laughing, joking, and giving directions to one another. At night they went out, and saw new meat-scaffolds in every direction as far as they could see. Then the two men came again, and told the children that the first drive would be made on the next day, and that a drive would be made on each day for four days. During this time, the children must remain inside;

but each night some of the choicest meat would be placed at their door. Also there would be a white buffalo each day in the herd, and the skin would be placed each night at the door. The rest of the meat would be placed on the scaffolds. The two men said that all the birds were going to help them drive the buffalo into the corral.

For the next four days the children remained inside, as they had been told. Each day they heard a great noise of birds and the tramping and bellowing of the trapped herds; and each night choice pieces of meat were placed at the door, where they could reach them from within.

On the fifth day, the children came out of the lodge and found the scaffolds everywhere covered with meat, ready cut up, and hung up out of reach of the wolves. At their door they found the four white buffalo-skins. They talked over for a long time what they should do with these skins. Finally they decided to save three of them to give to the chief of their people. The other one they gave to the old dog who had saved their lives, and had since been so faithful to them. They fixed up a nice soft bed of it for her.

Soon the two men came again to the children. They told No-Tongue that his people were starving, and that they were going to try to come to their old village on the river again. They told the children to prepare everything, and get ready to receive their people and divide the meat among them.

Meanwhile the people out on the prairie broke camp, and started to move back. They were nearly starved, and had to travel very slowly on account of the old people, the women, and the children, who were hardly able to walk. The chief decided to send a party ahead to try and find some food: so nine of the young men were picked, and they went on ahead as fast as they could. The young men came to the village after a long, hard march. The two men had told the children of their coming, and the children had everything ready to receive them. The young men came to the edge of the bank, and saw the smoke from the children's house. They wondered who it could be, living there in the woods. They feared it might be enemies; but they were so hungry that they decided to go and find out anyhow. So they started out, and soon came to the children's house. It was now night. The children invited them in, and gave them the food prepared. The two men had given No-Tongue full instructions as to what he should do and what was going to happen all the time.

On the following day, the children gave the young men what pemmican they could carry to take back to the rest of the people.

They travelled fast, and got the pemmican back to their people as quick as they could. All were nearly starved, yet the pemmican magically increased as it was used up, until every one was fully fed.

After being thus refreshed, and having heard the young men's story of the abundance of food at the children's camp, the people pressed on rapidly.

The two men kept No-Tongue warned as to the movements of the people, and told him what to do when they came. So the two children, at the suggestion of the men, prepared a great pot of soup for their father, when he should come to their house. At last the people arrived and the children received them. Then No-Tongue divided the scaffolds of meat, giving an allotted portion to each household. To the chief he also gave the three white-buffalo robes.

After this, the father came to the house of the children. To him they gave the soup, and kept urging him to eat, until he had finished it all. In his half-starved condition, the effects were deadly. The father began to be sick before he left their house, and he died before he could get back to the place where the people were camped.

For several days the people were busy taking care of their meat. Then they moved back to the old village on the bluff. The chief was very good to No-Tongue, and wished him to marry his daughter and take his own house, saying that he would build himself a new one. Shortly after the people moved back to the village, No-Tongue and his sister moved back also, taking with them the faithful old dog.

No-Tongue caused it to be announced that he wished to find out to whom the old dog belonged. Then he led her out into the open place in the village, and all the old women assembled there. They each took their turn, calling to the dog and talking to her; but she lay drowsing, and paid no attention to any of them. Finally all had tried, but one very poor old woman. She declared she did not believe that it could be her dog; for her dog was so old that it must have died long ago. However, her friends persuaded her to try. She went out and spoke to the dog from quite a distance, and the dog paid no attention. Then she approached nearer and called, and the dog roused up. Still nearer she went, and kept calling. The dog stood up, and, as the old woman approached, ran to her with every sign of gladness and recognition. So to this old woman, No-Tongue gave the white-buffalo robe which had been allotted to the old dog.